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S E R M O N

Preached before the HONOURABLE

HOUSE of COMMONS,

ON THE

GENERAL THANKSGIVING,

JULY 29, 1784.

Veneris, 30^o die Julii, 1784.

ORDERED,

THAT the Thanks of this House be given to the Reverend Dr. *George Pretyman*, Prebendary of the Collegiate Church of *Saint Peter, Westminster*, for the Sermon by him. preached Yesterday, before this House, at *Saint Margaret's, Westminster*, and that he be desired to print the same; and that MR. CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER and MR. WILBERFORCE do acquaint him therewith.



J. HATSELL,
Cl. Dom. Com.

A
S E R M O N

Preached before the HONOURABLE

HOUSE of COMMONS,

AT

ST. MARGARET'S, WESTMINSTER,

ON

THURSDAY, JULY 29, 1784:

Being the Day appointed, by His MAJESTY's Proclamation,

FOR A

GENERAL THANKSGIVING.

K BY *Tomline*
GEORGE PRETYMAN, D. D.
PREBENDARY OF WESTMINSTER.

L O N D O N :
PRINTED FOR B. WHITE, FLEET-STREET.

M.DCC.LXXXIV.

S E R M O N

Preached before the Honorable
HOUSE OF COMMONS

AT
ST. MARGARET'S, WESTMINSTER
ON
THE WEDNESDAY JULY 27. 1741.



GENERAL THANKSGIVING

FOR THE
GRACE AND MERCY OF GOD
TO THE
HONORABLE HOUSE OF COMMONS

BY
JOHN HENRY, ESQ.
OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE

PRINTED BY
J. HENRY, AT THE SIGN OF THE

COLOSSIANS iv. 2.

CONTINUE IN PRAYER, AND WATCH IN THE
SAME WITH THANKSGIVING.

IT is an opinion, founded upon the testimony of history, and confirmed by the experience of modern times, that the institution of some religious worship has subsisted in every nation. The proofs of the existence of some over-ruling Power are at once so obvious and so cogent, that they seize the attention of the uncivilized savage, and extort assent from the cavilling sceptic. As the consciousness of their own
existence,

existence, and the intuitive conviction that this existence must originate from some extraneous cause, probably first suggested to mankind the idea of a God; so the frequent dangers and distresses to which this life has ever been exposed, naturally induced men to offer up prayers and supplications to those deities, whom they thought the authors of their being, and governors of the universe. They believed that those who called them into existence, and were the disposers of all human events, could avert impending calamities, or remove oppressive evils; that the God of War could give them success in battle, and that he who ruled the raging of the sea could procure them a safe voyage. Conscious of their own weak and dependent state, they applied, as they thought, to the source of power, and entreated the assistance of their deities by those means which they judged most likely to prevail. Nor did they vainly arrogate to themselves the merit of good fortune; they attributed

their success not to the prowess of their own arms, or the wisdom of their own counsels, but humbly ascribed it to the favour and immediate interposition of Heaven. Calamities also, whether extending to a whole community, or confined to individuals, were constantly imputed to the resentment of some offended god, excited by a disdainful neglect of imploring his protection, or an impious omission of a propitiatory sacrifice. The Grecian orators and historians, reciting with exultation the glories and victories of their nation, assign the first praise to the assistance of their gods, and the second to the bravery of their countrymen; and the haughty Romans, who fancied their city to be the destined mistress of the world, upon the news of any signal success in war, or upon the deliverance from any national evil, invariably decreed a general thanksgiving and supplication at the shrines of all their numerous deities. Nor was there any thing, in all the wise and excellent institutions

tions of that wonderful republic, which more deserves our attention, or which tended more to raise and preserve its greatness, than the constant care of its government to keep alive in the people a sense of religion, to a degree in which I question whether it has ever existed in any other nation.

WHILST we read that the heathen never engaged in any business of the least importance without first imploring the protection of their gods, and that they were equally attentive in acknowledging their interposition, we cannot but admire their piety, although we have ample reason to condemn the monstrous enormities with which their religion abounded. The applause which we bestow upon their devotion and gratitude, so eminently displayed in their frequent prayers and thanksgivings, serves only to make us the more regret the imperfection and inconsistency of human reason, when we reflect upon the foolish doc-
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trines and wicked absurdities of their mythology ; doctrines which refute themselves, absurdities which would disgrace the most ignorant and uncivilized people. But however defective and blameable their religion may be in other respects, the private vows and supplications of individuals, and the public sacrifices and oblations which perpetually occur in Roman and Grecian authors, sufficiently indicate that those two celebrated nations of antiquity believed in the efficacy of prayer, and that they were by no means strangers to the duty of thanksgiving.

THE Hebrews, even in the infancy of their state, had an established liturgy ; and though the Jews are now dispersed over the face of the whole earth, yet there are certain prayers, extracted from this original form of worship, which make a part of the religion of every modern synagogue. The peace-offerings, which are so frequently mentioned in the Old Testament, were

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presented

presented either in the name of the whole congregation, or by particular persons, as grateful acknowledgments for mercies received; and public thanksgivings to Almighty God were customary among them, upon any signal mark of his favour.

THIS universal prevalence of prayer and thanksgiving, in every age and in every country, incontestably evinces the reasonableness of those duties, that they are suggested to us by the dictates of nature, and engraven upon our hearts at their original formation: but though adopted by every sect, and essential parts of every religion, they were by no means understood in their full extent and genuine purity, until the author and finisher of our faith condescended to appear on earth. We are now no longer left to the deceitful light of unassisted reason, but are guided by the unerring directions of divine revelation. *The hour cometh, and now is, when the true*

worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth. Our blessed Saviour teaches his disciples to correct the dangerous abuses, and abandon the numerous follies, which the ignorance and corruption of human nature had introduced. He condemns the hypocritical ostentation of praying in the public streets, to which the Jews were addicted, and commands them to avoid those multiplied petitions which the heathen addressed to their imaginary deities: he tells them that they are not to seek the assistance of God, or express their gratitude for blessings already received, by victims and oblations; much less are they, in imitation of the barbarous worshippers of Moloch, to give the fruit of their bodies for the sin of their souls. He that made the heavens and the earth, and whom even the heaven of heavens cannot contain, delights not in the multitude of sacrifices, in thousands of rams, nor in ten thousands of

rivers of oil. Purity of mind can alone procure acceptance to the prayers of men ; and obedience to the commands of our heavenly benefactor, is the only suitable demonstration of gratitude. *Bring me no more vain oblations. Wash ye ; make you clean ; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, saith the Lord. Cease to do evil ; learn to do good ; then draw nigh to God, and God will draw nigh to you.*—In the room of a superstitious dread of an unknown power, our holy religion substitutes a reasonable homage due to the greatest and best of beings. The gratitude of a Christian is not a transient glow of affection, excited by a recent instance of divine favour ; but it is a permanent and a powerful principle, founded upon the deep sense of obligation to the mercy and goodness of our Almighty Creator. It is not limited to the acts and times of immediate worship, but settled into an habitual rule of conduct, and displaying itself by a strict and

uniform attention to those duties, which may render us most deserving of his favour and protection.

A CONCERN for the prosperity of our country is perfectly compatible with the spirit and doctrine of our holy religion, the characteristic of which is universal Benevolence; it is a duty that becomes us as we are men, and as we are christians. We are exhorted by the apostle to pray and to give thanks for all men, especially for kings, and those that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.* In this country, beyond any other, our religious and civil rights are so intimately connected together, that the regard for the happy establishment of the most pure and reformed part of Christianity, will not suffer us, even in a religious view, to feel unconcerned in any event that

that respects the temporal interests of the nation. In compliance therefore with the universal practice which prevailed among all nations of the world, of publicly expressing their gratitude for national blessings, and in conformity to the general principles and tendency of the gospel, we are called upon this day, by the supreme authority, to go into the house of the Lord, and return thanks for the peace of Jerusalem. As calamities of the most dreadful nature are inseparable from a state of war, the restoration of peace must ever be considered as a public blessing, demanding a public acknowledgment to the giver of every good gift. But, that we may be enabled to judge of the degree of God's mercy on the present occasion, if we advert to the peculiar circumstances of our situation at the conclusion of the war; if we recollect the number, and the power of those enemies with whom we were engaged, and the variety and distance of those places which we were under the necessity

necessity of defending by our fleets and our armies; if we reflect upon our total want of allies, and our confessed inability to support, even for a short time longer, the unexampled expence of this complicated war; and if, to these considerations, we add our own internal distractions and divisions, which impeded the most effectual application of those few resources which yet remained, and prevented a vigorous exertion of that little force which we still possessed; if, I say, we take a general and impartial view of the state of this country immediately before the cessation of hostilities, both positively as to itself, and comparatively with respect to our enemies, we shall find ample reason to acknowledge, that we owe every hope and expectation which we may form of prosperity in future, and perhaps, at this moment, the very existence of the nation, to this favourable and timely interposition of Heaven. If the magnitude of the danger from which we are rescued be a just estimate

mate of the value of the blessing, our hearts indeed should overflow with gratitude—*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be ascribed the glory.*

THOUGH our exertions were of themselves incompetent to extricate this country from those complicated difficulties in which it was involved, it is yet incumbent upon us to allow the full proportion of praise to those human means which contributed to this happy end. In addition to the deliverance from the ordinary calamities of war, we should consider those persons, whose actions or counsels had any share in the restoration of peace, as being the willing instruments in the hands of Providence to save us from the danger of public bankruptcy ; from all that confusion and distress which must necessarily attend so violent a convulsion. This oppressed country already totters under the enormous weight of its public debt, and there is too much reason to apprehend

hend that it is utterly incapable of supporting any considerable addition to it, which must have been the consequence of the continuance of the war. These burdens, with very few trifling exceptions, have been gradually encreasing during the whole of this century; and, without minutely enquiring how nearly we already approach the limit of our resources, it is incontestably obvious that we cannot bear a perpetual increase of debt. The bravery of our countrymen is a sufficient security against the open attacks of foreign enemies; we must look at home for the source of real danger. External force, like an acute disease, though for a time it bears down all before it, may at length be resisted and checked by the vigour of nature; but an internal principle of dissolution, which prevents the proper circulation and exhausts the vital strength, scarcely admits relief.

THIS is certainly not a place for calling in question the justice of the origin of that war which was the beginning of sorrows, nor for enquiring into the wisdom of those measures by which it was conducted. These are transactions of too fatal an importance to the dearest interests of this country to be suffered easily to fall into oblivion; impartial history shall record them for the information and warning of present and future statesmen. But however men may differ now or hereafter in their sentiments respecting the cause and conduct of the war, they will all agree in deploring its disastrous consequences, which are not confined to any particular description of men, nor limited to the present times. Whilst, however, we feel and lament its severe and universal effects, let us not suffer our minds to be dejected by these melancholy reflections. Heavy indeed have been our expences, extensive beyond example has been our loss.

of territory, but our resources, though greatly diminished, are not exhausted; our national honour, though somewhat sullied, may, by proper exertions, be restored to its former splendor. Let us look back to the history of this country, and see how it has repeatedly emerged from the deepest distress; let us not be wanting to ourselves, and that gracious Providence, which has now given us the blessing of peace, as a foundation and earnest of future prosperity, will assist our honest endeavours.

I ACKNOWLEDGE that our situation is truly alarming, but at the same time I contend, that we ought not to despair; and I cannot avoid considering as enemies to their country, those gloomy theorists who are ever aggravating our distresses, and representing our ruin as inevitable and immediate. If their opinions should ever make a general impression upon

the minds of men, there will indeed from that moment be reason for despair; but I trust that the spirit of Englishmen will never shrink from those burdens which are essential to the maintenance of public faith, and which the exigencies of the times require. It was necessary to call to our recollection the critical state of this country, especially with respect to its revenue, in order to form an adequate idea of the extent of God's mercy, now vouchsafed unto these kingdoms: and if we have that reliance upon his goodness which becomes Christians, we ought not to doubt that the deliverance which his mercy has begun for us, his power will accomplish and make perfect.

As we have every year, upon solemn days appointed for that purpose, humbly bewailed those national sins which had provoked the vengeance of Heaven; and

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as we earnestly prayed that the Almighty would turn away from us his wrathful displeasure, and restore the blessing of peace; it becomes us now sincerely to acknowledge his merciful interposition, and receive with suitable gratitude what we begged by our repeated petitions. But let us remember, at the same time, that public thanksgiving is but a solemn mockery, if we do not testify our inward sense of the obligation by a conscientious obedience to the will of our heavenly Benefactor. The wickedness of the nation drew down upon us the calamities of war, and a penitent return to our duty can alone secure to us the lasting protection and favour of the Almighty. Let us then, with sincere and grateful hearts, adore the goodness of God, who hath rescued us from impending ruin; let us sanctify this day of our deliverance by laying aside all malice and hatred, that we may with one heart and one mind glorify God, who

hath given us the inestimable blessing of PEACE;
 and let us all join in humbly imploring, and by the
 purity of our lives let us all endeavour to deserve, a
 long continuance of public tranquillity, thus happily
 restored to us; which alone can extricate us from our
 present difficulties, and raise this oppressed Country
 to its ancient prosperity and glory.



F I N I S.